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Sir

Plain talks to Irish farmers

Dublin

1910

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PLAIN TALKS TO IRISH FARMERS:

An examination of the changes which must be made by Irish Farmers in the management of their private and public affairs if the land settlement is to bring prosperity to Ireland.

BY

SIR HORACE PLUNKETT.



1854-

"It is provided in the essence of things that from any fruition of success, no matter what, shall come forth something to make a greater struggle necessary."

WALT WHITMAN.

DUBLIN:

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1910

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PREFACE

For those who are not farmers.

THE following pages relate to a movement and a policy which have been built up during the last two decades. The movement aims at a complete re-organisation of the farming business in Ireland on co-operative lines, its promoters believing that this will result not only in economic, but also in social improvement. The policy seeks to define the principles upon which the newly-provided State assistance to agriculture should be administered so as to evoke and supplement organised self-help. The scheme as a whole is the working out of a now well known formula for the rehabilitation of rural life—better farming, better business, better living. Thus it is hoped that, as the land settlement proceeds, agriculture in Ireland may be gradually raised to the level of efficiency which it has reached in many European countries where the land question has been settled. The present pamphlet is a revised and condensed reproduction of some articles which I have recently written in *The Irish Homestead*. I seized the occasion of an attack upon the movement and the policy to explain and defend both.

No one will deny the gravity or importance of the main issue I discuss. In the circumstances of Ireland the prosperity of the farmer is a fundamental condition of the well-being of all classes. Personally I doubt the feasibility of developing subsidiary industries while the main industry of a country is in a backward condition. Holding this view I address myself to Irish farmers and try to make them first understand the position which they now occupy in the national life, and accept the full responsibility for working

out not only their own, but also their country's economic salvation.

Such a task would, it may be said, tax the mental and moral resources of any rural community. Happily our farmers are highly intelligent, and a larger number of them will understand what I have written than those who do not know them would imagine. But in the re-building of rural life now admittedly needed in many countries, a great deal of help from those who are not farmers will be required. In Ireland, where the problem is one of exceptional urgency, this national endeavour offers to any educated man, clerical or lay, having leisure at his disposal and a desire to serve the society around him, work in Ireland, and for Ireland, as interesting as it is important. I think that the country may fairly look first to the landlords who have sold out. Associations for intellectual and social improvement, such as the Gaelic League, whose members have always been sympathetic towards the co-operative idea and helpful to the co-operative movement, may also like to consider the situation I have endeavoured to make clear. To all who will help in this service a knowledge of the complex economic and social conditions is necessary. I offer in this pamphlet the thoughts of one man upon what, to him at any rate, is a fundamental question of Irish prosperity.

HORACE PLUNKETT.

October, 1910.

PLAIN TALKS TO IRISH FARMERS.

I.—The Farmer as Nation Builder.

You, the farmers of Ireland, to whom I speak, have it in your power to make or mar the fortunes and the reputation of our country. Masters of its natural resources, producers of almost all its wealth, you are the makers of its life. Your fellow-countrymen at home and abroad see in your skill, industry and intelligence the only hope of saving the present, for which we are responsible, from the depressing effects of a past in which we had no share. It depends mainly upon you whether the present generation of Irish workers will leave to those who come after them an inheritance of excuses; of which the world is getting tired, or a fine example of practical patriotism.

As one of the promoters of the farmers' movement started one and twenty years ago to meet a crisis which has arisen as we foresaw, I feel that I can help you to reap the benefits and overcome the difficulties of the new position which you occupy in the life of our country. If you would rise to the opportunities and avoid the dangers of occupying ownership, you will have not only to make a radical reform in your methods of farming and of doing business; you will also have to take a more active and intelligent interest in the conduct of your public affairs so far as it affects the prospects of your industry. In both these matters many of you have gone ahead of the better off farmers across the Channel. But at this critical moment your progress is obstructed by

political misunderstanding which you, and you alone, can remove.

In a country where the land means so much it is not easy to convince people that the use which is made of it is quite as important as owning it; but so it is. Then, again, as the result of long misgovernment we have to struggle against that bane of backward peoples, the belief in the all-sufficiency of State remedies for social and economic ills. It was to counteract this enervating tendency that the self-help movement was founded. Its root principle, co-operation, is simply organised self-help. The organisation of self-help is, in a word, the work of your Irish Agricultural Organisation Society. Its founders saw that the agrarian agitation would have the same issue in Ireland as in other European countries, and that you would become the owners of your land. Most of you, living and working upon small holdings, would belong to the agricultural class for whom ever since foreign competition changed all the conditions of European agriculture, it has become increasingly difficult to maintain a decent standard of living. Everywhere abroad agriculture has been revolutionised both in the cultivation of the land and in the business methods of farmers to meet the altered conditions. Everywhere the futility of isolated, the power of organised, action has been recognised. You must follow where the experience of every progressive country in Europe leads.

There could be no doubt about the soundness of the agricultural co-operation in which so many of you have been engaged. It has been effective in improving all depressed rural communities wherever it has been tried. Abroad, the clergy support it on account of its moral value; economists, for the saving it effects in the production and distribution of wealth; and statesmen, because it has an elevating and steadying political influence. In countries where governments concern themselves for the well-being of rural communities, administrators encourage the organisation of farmers upon co-operative lines for business purposes,

because they find that, until this condition is supplied, the farmers do not derive full benefit from the assistance which it is the province of the State to afford.

In Ireland an increasing number of public-spirited men, both lay and clerical, have for many years been urging you to join in a movement for doing what had proved so beneficial all over Europe. And there is something to show for the efforts of the Irish co-operative pioneers and of the I.A.O.S. which in 1894 took over their work. More than half the total export of Irish butter comes from your creameries, which, thanks to your movement, you own yourselves. Farmers' societies are learning how to get their agricultural requirements at a low price and of good quality. Co-operative credit has made quite a remarkable beginning in the poorest parts of the country. The marketing of Irish produce is still shockingly wasteful, but in some cases, especially in butter and eggs, organisation is beginning to tell. The total turnover of the movement will reach this year some £3,000,000. This is not a bad beginning, but I must tell you frankly that my most competent associates regard the work done as the mere foundation of the edifice of Irish progress which you have to build.

In order that you may understand the latest political opposition to this scheme of social and economic progress for Ireland, I must tell you how it all arose. In the early days of the self-help movement, we had the same experience as the pioneers of agricultural co-operation in other countries. We were strongly opposed by traders, but as the Government did not then concern itself with agricultural development, we were entirely detached from political affairs, and politicians left us alone. Soon, however, it became absolutely necessary that we should take a certain part in politics in your behalf. While we were telling you about all that your continental rivals were doing for themselves, others were enlarging upon what their governments were doing for them. All our studies convinced us that until farmers have learned to work together in their private business, they do not know what

they want from the Government, and they have neither the political influence to get State assistance, nor the ability to put it to the best advantage when obtained. This necessary stage in organisation was reached when our movement was only six years old. We then used the influence you had gained by organised self-help, and launched a policy for getting the Government to do its duty by you. I shall show you later how, in the furtherance of this policy, the Recess Committee was convened in 1895 and the Department of Agriculture, based upon that body's Report, was created in 1899.

Thus was opened a new chapter in Irish economic history, and thus was placed in your hands the power to build upon the foundation of the land settlement a new and progressive rural civilisation. But the broadening of your efforts necessarily brought your organisation into touch with legislation and administration. Then the opposition of trade, which was dying down, was reinforced by the far more formidable hostility of politicians. I hold that the entire trouble arises from a complete misunderstanding as to their real interests on the part both of traders and politicians, and to ignorance, which I fear most of you share, as to the respective functions of voluntary effort and State assistance in developing the resources of the country. But it is your interests chiefly which are being sacrificed, and this because, while trade and politics are organised, agriculture is unorganised. I propose to show you how necessary it is that this should be changed, and that your industry can never prosper until you get to understand the situation and to use the power which you possess so as to have your public affairs managed in your own, and in nobody else's, interest. In other words, you must have a clear, consistent agricultural policy and an organisation which has the power to see that this policy is carried out. All that follows has been written with the sole purpose of making this plain to you.

II.—The Farmer, the Trader, and the Politician.

Among the indiscretions of my unruly pen I once wrote, "The more business in politics and the less politics in business, the better for both." Like most attempts to put a large truth into the smallest number of words, this phrase left too much for the reader to supply. I ought to have added a proviso that the business must be honest business, must properly belong to the politics. In the situation with which we are dealing, we have agricultural politics dominated by trading business. Measures nominally for the good of the farmer are really framed so as to protect the trader. This is bad for politics, because no good ever comes from false issues. They never settle anything—the truth will come out and must ultimately prevail. It is equally bad for business, and for the same reason.

You have recently had a timely illustration of what happens to your public interests when, lacking organisation, you cannot look after them yourselves. On July 7, 1910, a debate took place in the House of Commons upon the administration of the Department of Agriculture by Mr. T. W. Russell, more especially his attitude towards the I.A.O.S. I wish you could all read this debate in the official report. You would be made in turn proud and angry, merry and sad. As you watched the game of battledore and shuttlecock played across the floor of the House for the benefit of an English audience, you would be immensely diverted, until you realised that the shuttlecock was your industry—that is, your life in Ireland. Then you would turn away in disgust and say, "This may be politics, but it is not statesmanship; it may be sport, but it is not business." But the more you think over the debate the more you will come to see where the fault lies. It is with you, who are politically powerless because you are imperfectly organised. You have still to learn that your public business will be looked after just as well as you conduct your private business, and no better.

Let us now consider the true significance of this discussion of Irish business in the English Parliament. Remember that over there at Westminster matters of vital importance to you were being discussed. The real question at issue—and indeed the chief subject to which I desire to call your attention—was the proper relations which should exist between self-help and State-aid in an Irish scheme of agricultural progress through which its supporters hope that you will be able to build up a new agricultural life in Ireland. This question was touched on by a few—a very few—speakers, and was discussed in a masterly manner by Mr. S. H. Butcher.

Mr. Birrell made a characteristically brilliant and witty speech, and as he was the Minister responsible to Parliament for any acts of administration which might be criticised upon a discussion of the Estimates of the Department, the House would naturally take the facts from him. In the absence of Mr. Russell no one can blame him for speaking to his brief and making the best defence he could. He was in great difficulties, having no first-hand knowledge of the really important facts, and his second-hand knowledge naturally coming from sources which could hardly be considered as impartial. Relying upon the information placed at his disposal, which happened to be grotesquely inaccurate, he invited the House to regard the whole business—which, no doubt, bored him—in the light of “a strange sort of feud between the out-going and the in-coming person”; that is, between the late Vice-President of the Department and his successor. He assured the House that “Mr. Russell’s conduct was absolutely free from blame.” We can imagine the Chief Secretary, having successfully defended his absent colleague from the representatives of Ulster farmers who had proposed that his salary should be reduced on account of his behaviour to your movement, comforting Mr. Russell with the very practical philosophy of old Omar Khayyam:—

“Ah, take the cash and let the credit go,
Nor heed the rumble of the distant drum.”

But let us pass from persons and personalities and come to the pith and substance of this discussion which *The Times*, no doubt accurately, described in its leading article next day as “an animated debate not easily intelligible to the uninitiated.” The real trouble was that the efforts which you and your friends are making to improve the conditions of your industry are being wantonly thwarted by two bodies of Irishmen, who, pursuing different ends, work in close alliance with each other and have hitherto exercised a paramount influence upon the public life of Ireland. The country traders believe that the profits you make by combining to do your own business must come out of their pockets. Some politicians fear that associations of farmers, organised for business purposes, will become a new force in public life, and by diverting your attention from your political duties, may postpone the realisation of Ireland’s demand for self-government. In other words, agricultural co-operation in the view of some traders is bad for trade, and in the view of some politicians is bad for politics.

I hold both these views to be erroneous. As for trade, it is quite safe to say that if you applied both to the art and to the business of farming the methods which are used by the best organised farmers of the Continent you might easily double the margin of profit which you have available for general expenditure, and any local traders who had not the intelligence to benefit by this change ought to go out of business. To my knowledge, foreign observers of your movement have been amazed at the continued failure of the commercial and industrial leaders in the south to see that no real and lasting prosperity can come to the industry and commerce of a country while its chief producers, who are also the most important body of home consumers, are in a backward and unprosperous condition.

The opposition between the broader and the narrower view of trade interests has been sharply brought out by recent events. On the 4th of July the Limerick Chamber of

Commerce passed a resolution supporting the Department's refusal to help the I.A.O.S. The Waterford Chamber subsequently adopted the Limerick resolution, and Mr. T. W. Russell wrote, in a letter which was published: "The approval of the policy of the Department by such bodies as the Chambers of Commerce is a great source of strength to me." Mr. Dillon, in the House of Commons on July 7, referred to the same resolution in order "to show that public opinion in Ireland is not altogether behind" the I.A.O.S. Of this the country has long been fully aware; but on July 25 the Council of the Dublin Chamber of Commerce, who surely speak with authority for the leaders of industrial and commercial enterprise in Ireland, ordered the following minute of their proceedings to be made and published:—

"On reading the resolution of the Limerick Chamber of Commerce relative to the present policy of the Department of Agriculture with regard to subsidising Agricultural Organisation, it was unanimously resolved:—

"That improvements in the business methods of those who conduct the chief wealth-producing industry of the country must increase their consuming power; that this will develop the home market and so benefit the trade of Irish manufacturers and wholesale merchants; that the chief defect in the business methods of the Irish farmers is their failure to adopt the co-operative system which is practised universally by the farmers of the Continent who compete with the Irish farmers in the British markets; that a portion of the funds provided by the Government for the purpose of developing the farming industry in Ireland may properly be devoted to the instruction of farmers in the principles and details of agricultural organisation; that public monies appropriated to this purpose can be most advantageously applied through a non-trading voluntary association which has experience in this special work."

"Whilst giving expression to these opinions, the Council strongly hold that every effort should be made to carry out the necessary reform in the business methods of farmers in such a manner as to cause the least possible disturbance of existing trade arrangements."

On the 28th of July, the Council of the Belfast Chamber,

which speaks with at least equal authority for trade, endorsed emphatically the action of the Dublin Chamber. This broad and generous recognition of your place in the life of the country will, I have little doubt, put an end to the disastrous conflict between agriculture and trade. You must now put an end to the no less destructive and much more demoralising conflict between agriculture and politics. And in doing this you need not attack any political party and you must not allow them to be attacked in your name.

There ought to be no more conflict between the farmer and politician than between the farmer and the trader. The stirring of new thought in any community—especially when it calls for action affecting business matters—necessarily arouses opposition. The true lover of his country will seek to minimise this opposition. He will try so to influence the thought which is changing as to keep it in harmony with the facts which he cannot alter. He will rely upon reason and exercise patience. The leaders of your movement have certainly not failed in this respect; they have acted throughout in a spirit of moderation; they have defended themselves from attack, but most assuredly they have taken ten blows for the one they have given.

But I think that we co-operators, like true Irishmen, have carried our moderation to excess. For fear we should be accused of political action of the wrong kind, we have failed to assert political influence of the right kind. We have insisted that the co-operative organisation of farmers under their central union, the I.A.O.S., should be non-political; and we were quite right; it must always be so. But we have failed to make it clear to you that this agricultural movement must be supplemented by an agricultural policy, which shall govern in the interest of the movement whatever legislation and administration relates to it. The movement is non-political, because it is concerned only with private business. The policy will be political only so far as it is concerned with the making and the administering of laws affecting agriculture, but it will be non-party because in it,

as in the movement, men of all parties will have to act together in advancing it.

Now it has often been said, and it will be said often again, that your agricultural movement is not—that the I.A.O.S. never has been—non-political and that there can be no such thing, at any rate in Ireland, as a non-party policy. People who talk like this know as little about real politics as about agricultural economics. Your agricultural movement and the I.A.O.S. are non-political, for the simple reason that their usefulness depends upon uniting men of all parties for material advantage and social progress. The moment the Society worked for or against either of the political parties, it would immediately collapse. It may, however, initiate and support a non-party agricultural policy. Let me explain to you what I mean by this term.

When land legislation was before Parliament, although it would have been most desirable to get all parties to support a system of land tenure which would result in the greatest amount of wealth being produced and the largest number of people settled in comfort upon the land, you could no more keep the land question, than English business men could keep the tariff question, out of party politics. You were undoubtedly right, in your own interests, to give a free hand to the political party which looked at matters from the tenants' point of view. On the other hand, the making of laws and the administration of Government institutions which relate, not to the ownership but to the use of the land, should not be party questions at all. They are so treated in Ireland because there is no agricultural public opinion which can force politicians to treat them otherwise. In the eyes of impartial critics, your representatives are throwing away the credit they gained in the fight for the land by continuing to fight over matters where party warfare is destructive of industry. But I am bound to tell you that the fault is more yours than theirs, and that there is only one way by which a remedy can be found.

The chief lesson I have learned from the events which have

made the occasion for these Plain Talks is that your weakness lies in politics rather than in business, and the weakness of our politicians lies in business rather than in politics. If you get to understand agricultural politics, your representatives will learn the elements of agricultural economics and then all will go smoothly. I shall show you later the hopeless confusion which now exists in the agricultural policy of Ireland owing to two opposite views. For this confusion I am, it seems, held responsible, and for my part I gladly leave the issue in your hands.

I think my politics, the exact nature of which many people seem to know better than I do, rather than my economic views are the cause of the offence. In the Galway election I offended equally Mr. William Moore and Mr. John Dillon. Mr. Dillon, finding that Mr. Moore had, by accusing me of Nationalism, taken the edge off my political iniquities, charged me with using the patronage of the Department to purchase votes, a delicate suggestion that Galway would be more properly named "The City of the Bribes." Towards the end of my connection with the Department, I read in the *Freeman's Journal* (November 12, 1906) a speech of Mr. John Dillon's at Liverpool. He appears to have felt called upon to explain the somewhat obscure grounds of his opposition to that institution, and he explains it thus:—"I know from my own knowledge that it is from top to bottom a machine to burst up and destroy the national party and the national movement." The high explosive indicated was, no doubt, agricultural co-operation, and I the Guy Fawkes in the plot. We need not attach undue importance to these little extravagances, and I do not deny that they are the somewhat infelicitous expression of very real opinions. I disagree strongly with Mr. Dillon's ideas as to the true interests of Ireland in the matters we are discussing, but I have never disputed the honesty of his motives and wish he could say as much about mine. No man could use such language as that which I have quoted unless he were under a complete misapprehension as to the aims and objects not only of myself,

but of all of you who have done me the honour to trust and to work with me. I will now put my views upon the question of principle involved, in the more moderate language which happens to suit my temperament.

I understand that Mr. Dillon justifies the opposition which he leads against the policy I have described on the grounds that, in some way or other, it will injure the prospects of Home Rule. I have written and stated publicly on many occasions that I believe the surest way to get what may be constitutionally best for us is to work together for mutual advantage in matters which do not necessarily divide parties. I hold that the value of any constitutional change must be increased with every improvement in the life of a community which enables it to turn the improvement, when obtained, to the best advantage. Those who resist progress on the ground that it may make you cease to desire Home Rule, are only preparing a feast of dust and ashes should they attain their object. I am inclined to think that the country is getting sick of the notion that your comfort and prosperity will make you less keen politicians, that—like a pack of hounds—you won't hunt unless you are kept hungry. At any rate, neither Mr. Dillon's general political views nor mine ought to weigh with practical farmers when they are considering what should be the agricultural policy of Ireland. To that question I now pass.

III.—The Right Agricultural Policy for Ireland: Its Origin and Progress.

In considering what is the best agricultural policy for Ireland, let us take first the answer given fifteen years ago by the Recess Committee, the first of those round-table conferences which have been a happy feature in modern Irish life. The object of the conveners was to see whether leading Irishmen of different parties, creeds and interests could not, by working together, obtain from Parliament some such assistance in the development of our

agricultural and industrial resources as foreign countries, especially those whose agricultural produce competes with ours, enjoy at the hands of their Governments. No one has ever denied that the Committee was representative of agriculture, trade, and politics. Some difficulty was met with in making it politically representative, and it is only fair to say that it is chiefly due to Mr. John Redmond who, with much courage, brought in his section of the then divided Nationalist Party, that the difficulty was overcome. The other section of that party, fearing the political results of a non-party policy, held aloof. The more militant section of the Irish Unionist Party were similarly shy, the late Colonel Saunderson refusing to associate himself with so lion-and-lamb-like a proceeding. Nevertheless, the Committee, although deprived of the assistance of extremists, was so constituted as to be able to see the questions at issue from every political standpoint. In a business sense, no body of Irishmen could have been more representative. The leading industrial and commercial men of Ulster formed a branch of the Committee and sat separately in Belfast; but they came to Dublin when the report was drafted and helped to make it unanimous. It is to their lasting honour that, although their interests were commercial and industrial, these men of Ulster recognised the paramount importance of agriculture in the national life, and bespoke for you and for your industry the chief share of the good things the Government was asked to provide for Irish workers. The same generous recognition of your claims inspired the recent action of the Dublin and Belfast Chambers of Commerce.

I need not discuss with you the industrial policy of the Committee, which consisted chiefly of technical instruction; we may confine ourselves to its agricultural policy. Perhaps the most remarkable feature in this part of the Committee's Report is the way in which the principle of co-operation stands out. This is the more remarkable when it is remembered that trade opposition to your movement was

much stronger than it is to-day. What most impressed the outside critics was the cardinal principle which underlay the Committee's demand of the Government for the promotion of agriculture and industry. It was insisted that State aid should be given in such a manner as to encourage voluntary effort, and that the Government should carefully avoid doing anything which would make you less determined to do for yourselves, by your united efforts, those things which foreign farmers recognised as being of far greater value than anything which the best of Governments could do for them.

Few of you in those days understood clearly what all this meant, and I have no doubt it seemed to you that the Committee's recommendations fell lamentably short of what Ireland had a right to ask from England. The fact is the Committee was determined to find according to the evidence, believing that this offered the only hope of any practical issue to their labours. In their behalf two extremely able Commissioners—Mr. T. P. Gill and the late Mr. Michael Mulhall, the eminent statistician—made enquiries in nine European countries. These countries were specially selected because they contained agricultural communities which had formerly been depressed and which were now comparatively prosperous—much more so than you are. Our Commissioners were instructed to distinguish with great care how much of the improvement which had been effected in the farmers' position was due to the organised efforts of the people themselves and how much to the assistance they obtained from the Government. In every case, as we had expected, self-help had been immensely more fruitful than State aid. Furthermore, it was found that the Government helped the farmers in proportion as the farmers combined together to help themselves—not, perhaps, so much on grounds of principle as of necessity. For the self-help was organised, and organisation gave the farmers political influence. Three principles of agricultural progress everywhere governed the agricultural policy of these countries:—

organisation, education and representation. Accordingly the agricultural Departments encourage and, as far as possible, work with and through co-operative associations. While these bodies attended to the business of farming, they were found to be invaluable agencies for applying science to farming. Their chief demand of the Government was for educational facilities—the term “education” being given a very wide and practical interpretation. Representation was secured by giving to local representative bodies as much control over the central institution as was consistent with efficient administration.

The same general idea was expressed in the recommendations of the Recess Committee, which framed a policy and practically united Ireland in a demand to have it by law established. That demand would never have been granted had it not been that public opinion in England was moved by learning, for the first time, that the Irish farmers were seriously entering upon a co-operative movement, and that they were merely asking the Government to give them the assistance that they required in order to supplement their own organised self-help. The outcome of the Recess Committee's report was the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction. In it you have an institution superior in its resources, in its elasticity, in its scope, aim, purpose, and in the representative character of its constitution, to any similar branch of Government in the British Empire. Properly understood and used, it places in your hands the means of developing to its highest capacity the chief source of Ireland's wealth by giving you who have to do the work the right help in the right way.

In the constitution of the Department two distinct objects were achieved—one was the consolidation in a single office of all the functions of government which relate to your business, and which you will remember were formerly scattered among a lot of “Castle Boards.” There was nothing new about this reform, which everybody agreed to be necessary. The other part of the policy was new and

was of vast importance to the future of Ireland. The new branch of Government was to be charged with the duty of giving to the young members of the farming community a good modern practical education, and to adult members information, advice and all other legitimate aids to their industry. There was to be an end to the policy of neglect, which its English authors dignify with the French name of *laissez faire*. At the same time there was to be no attempt to do your business for you; you were merely to be given the kind of institution which, once you knew how to work it, would enable you to raise your industry to the level of efficiency attained through the same means by your competitors abroad. In the Department you have a machine which I believe to be altogether suited to your needs. If it is not, its constitution provides you with the way to improve it. Recent events have made it only too evident that you do not realise your position and duty in this vitally important matter. Let me therefore try to explain to you the representative constitution of the Department, for this is the thing which you must understand clearly and use firmly if you wish to put an end to party interference with your non-party policy.

In general politics, we all know what we mean by the term "representative"; we mean that as many voters as possible should have a finger in the pie. A business department, on the other hand, can be properly called representative only when it is controlled by those to whose business it relates. By this test your Department can be shown to be representative in a degree which has never been equalled in the constitution of any branch of central government in these islands. The way in which Mr. Gerald Balfour attempted to secure your control of it was, in my judgment, a fine piece of constructive statesmanship. The Department had to be made responsible to Parliament, because the moneys wanted for certain necessary functions of government—such as protecting our flocks and herds from disease—had to be annually voted by Parliament in accordance with the needs of the year. But

in regard to agricultural development, Mr. Gerald Balfour made his Department responsible to Irish opinion through the Council of Agriculture and the Agricultural Board. Two-thirds of the Council of Agriculture are elected by the County Councils, and the Council of Agriculture itself appoints two-thirds of the members of the Agricultural Board.

Unfriendly critics of the Department's constitution have maintained that it is not truly democratic because the remaining one-third both of the Council and the Board are nominated by the Vice-President. The reason for this provision was that political considerations might prevent representative bodies from choosing individuals who, from a purely business point of view, ought to be included in bodies of this kind. As a matter of fact, I think you will find that the nominated one-third is at least as representative of agriculture as the elected two-thirds. Except when Mr. T. W. Russell removed the Secretary of the I.A.O.S. from the Council, I am not aware that personal bias, or any consideration other than that of your interests, ever affected the appointment of the Department's nominees.

The most interesting as well as the most original feature of the Department's constitution is the dual responsibility of its working Head. The Recess Committee insisted, and Mr. Gerald Balfour against his own judgment agreed, that the Vice-President, whom he made as far as possible responsible to you, should also be a Minister responsible to Parliament. The Committee of Inquiry into the constitution and working of the Department, which took evidence all over Ireland, reported in favour of single responsibility to you. In the Irish Councils Bill of 1907 the Government proposed to carry out this recommendation. There are reasons for and against the Parliamentary position. The chief advantage is that the Vice-President can give more time to getting special legislation than the Chief Secretary. It is fair to Mr. T. W. Russell to say that he has done well in this. On the other hand, he took sides with the opponents of the Recess Committee policy and supported the policy of

1909 which, as I shall show, was a cruel blow to agricultural progress. The disadvantage of having the Vice-President a party man, at any rate until you have got control of your public affairs, has been so signally illustrated by the present occupant of the post that I need not labour it. It is enough to say that, under the present *régime*, your Department has been used to attack and discredit the only voluntary organisation you have. On the whole, I think a non-party post is better for the administration of what ought to be a non-party policy. The responsibility to Irish public opinion is adequately provided for. In the years when constitutional precedents were being made I frequently assured the Council of Agriculture that I would resign the moment they gave me the slightest hint that I no longer retained their confidence.

Mr. Gerald Balfour not only provided you with constitutional means for exercising control over the Department, but he further gave you the fullest participation in its practical schemes by making it obligatory upon the Department to delegate its local work to the County Councils. They were empowered to appoint committees, upon which they could put the best farmers, even if they were not members of the Councils. They could, by contributing from the rates a part of the cost, initiate and administer schemes with the approval of the Department and under its expert supervision. These provisions place in your hands means and resources which farmers in every country in Europe find adequate to their need; and these resources are under effective popular control by a purely Irish assembly. The Irish Farmers' Department, thus constituted with its Agricultural Council and Board, gives you a sort of farmers' Parliament and farmers' Cabinet. But representative institutions are only what those whom they serve make them, and you have much to do before your Department can challenge comparison with some similar institutions abroad. Meanwhile you can fairly claim that both in its conception and its work there is nothing better of the kind in the British Isles.

IV.—The Wrong Agricultural Policy for Ireland.

Whether the policy of the Recess Committee, which I have described somewhat fully, was right or wrong, time will decide. At any rate, it was adapted from Continental policies framed in answer to the demand of organised farmers. In 1895 the political position allowed a similar non-party policy to be offered to you. In 1909 the balance of English parties made the Liberals extremely anxious to oblige their Irish allies and, whoever was its real author, there was grafted on to Mr. Birrell's Land Act of that year a wholly new agricultural policy which we must now examine. That policy, which I regard as retrograde and destructive of agricultural progress in Ireland, is represented by the new Congested Districts Board.

I am not attacking the Board itself; I am a member of it, as I was of the old Board, and it would ill become me to attack either of them. The old Board, with its limited resources, did a great deal of good work, more especially by buying land and enlarging and re-distributing small holdings. I have no doubt the new Board, with its larger income, will do a proportionately larger quantity of this work, which is most important and necessary. I devoutly hope that we shall show you that we have the character and capacity required to exercise this exceedingly difficult responsibility impartially and wisely. It should be borne in mind, however, that this business of the redistribution of land, important and necessary as it is, was not the whole business of the old Congested Districts Board and is not the whole business of the new one. Both the old Board and the new were given important duties in connection with the improvement and development of agriculture; they were made parts of an agricultural policy; and here is where I think your political leaders went wrong.

I think it will be helpful to remind you of the chief events which have affected the Government's work for the poorer farmers in the West of Ireland. Mr. Arthur Balfour estab-

lished the old Congested Districts Board in 1891. At that time your organisation movement had only just started, and had not made much way; agricultural co-operation was very little heard of in Ireland. The Department of Agriculture, and the system of Local Government which has made a democratic organisation possible for the Department, were not yet in existence. The notion of self-help is not half strong enough in Ireland yet, but in 1891 it hardly existed at all. It is not surprising, therefore, that Mr. Balfour, in dealing with the poorest, weakest, and most backward parts of Ireland, used the method of paternal government. He could hardly have done anything else. But I think the members of the Board he set up might have done more than they did to stimulate and encourage from the first the idea that the poor communities they were dealing with—even the poorest—would receive help in proportion to the efforts they made to help themselves.

I frequently urged this view on those who were my colleagues on the old Board. I yield to no one in my admiration of the good work they did, both along the coast and inland; but I was, and am, continually troubled by the question, how much of that good work will last? Of all the improvements which the Board has started in the congested districts, how much would remain ten years hence if the Board were abolished to-morrow? I fear, very little. No improvement in the congested districts will be permanent unless it includes an improvement in the industrial habits and business methods of the people; no help will be effective in the long run unless it leads to self-help. The Board could not be blamed for beginning with paternal methods; they were no doubt necessary. But they ought to have been worked so as to lead to their own abolition; paternalism should gradually and steadily have been superseded by self-help; and, on the whole, it was not.

You may think this criticism of a dead Board ungenerous and needless; it is, unfortunately, necessary in order to make clear what followed. In 1895, the Recess Committee, as we

have said, enunciated an agricultural policy for Ireland based on organisation and self-help; in 1899 the machinery for carrying out that policy was set up in the shape of the Department of Agriculture. This magnificent engine of improvement was intended to work for the benefit of the nation as a whole, and in every part of the country, but it did not and does not work freely in every part, because in the congested districts it found the ground occupied by another organisation, imbued with a different spirit. In this as in all things the spirit is more important than the machinery. I should be very patient of mere administrative complications and anomalies; what I cannot approve, and what you ought not to tolerate, is the encouragement of paternal authority on the one side and helpless dependence on the other, among communities where the farmers are perfectly capable of helping themselves if they are encouraged to do so.

Now, in 1900 and the years following, when the newly formed Department of Agriculture began to apply this policy in the congested districts, it was soon found that it could not work side by side with the policy of the Congested Districts Board. It was not merely that there were separate officials and separate institutions—that could have been got over. The point is, you cannot teach the same men at the same time to depend upon themselves and not to depend upon themselves. The remedy for this difficulty was obvious enough. Certain very backward districts—not large ones—might be left for a time longer to paternal government; but over the greater part of the congested districts it was time to drop that policy and take up the other. The powers of the Congested Districts Board for the improvement of agriculture and industries ought to have been transferred to the Department of Agriculture and the Board left free to concentrate on its proper work, the redistribution of land—a problem large enough and difficult enough in all conscience to occupy the whole attention of any body of men however able and devoted. Accordingly, a beginning was made with this transfer as soon as the Department's rather complicated

relations with the agricultural and technical committees of the County Councils came to be understood and to work smoothly. In 1904 a large part of the Congested Districts Board's duties in the sphere of agricultural improvement, and a small part of its funds, were handed over to the Department of Agriculture. The transfer was incomplete and insufficient, and not properly financed, but it was a step in the right direction; it meant that the province of paternal government was to diminish, and the province of self-help was to increase.

When Mr. Birrell rehandled the problem of congestion last year, to the amazement of every student of recent Irish progress, he did not diminish the area of paternalism, he enormously increased it. He based his measure on the report of a Royal Commission. That bulky document is a mine of information and a monument of industry on the part of those who collected it. But, in my judgment, the fatal mistake was made of not profiting by the rich and varied experience of Europe in dealing with similar conditions, and, what was much worse, of utterly failing to understand the spirit and the actual achievement of those Irishmen who had profited by that experience. Mr. Birrell proposed to abolish the old Congested Districts Board and to create a new one, with greatly increased powers and funds, and to give it a much larger territory to work in—the whole province of Connaught, Donegal, part of Clare, Kerry, and part of Cork—more than a third of all Ireland.

Now, observe what happened when the Bill came before Parliament. Everyone understood, and all the politicians fought over, the question of land purchase; they disputed whether more redistribution of land was necessary, whether it ought to be done separately for the Congested Districts or not, whether compulsory powers were required, whether Mr. Birrell's Board was the right sort of body to exercise compulsion. Finally, they came to a compromise; they gave the new Board its territory, its money and modified powers of compulsion, and they changed its method of appointment; the members were to be appointed by the Government and

not chosen by the County Councils.* All this was disputed and settled with a view to land purchase and that alone; and you would have thought the reasonable and natural thing would be to let the new Board deal with land purchase only. But that is not what happened. Certain powers and duties of the Congested Districts Board were, indeed, transferred to the Department of Agriculture, but the terms of the Act leave it very doubtful how far this extends; and it is certain that the new Board have the power to devote a considerable part of their funds to assisting agricultural development. The question whether agricultural co-operation is one of the subjects they have to deal with is interesting and difficult; I shall return to it. But the new Board have the money and the power, if they choose, to extend and develop all over their territory the paternal methods of the old Board. And there are strong influences which urge them to do so.

Do you see what this means? It means that in the new congested districts—far larger than the old ones—under present influences and pending a clear expression of your wishes in the matter, self-help is bound to diminish and paternalism to increase; that over a third part of Ireland the farmers, instead of dealing with the Department which helps them in proportion as they help themselves, and is largely under the control of their own representatives, are to deal with a Board which will distribute its favours precisely as it pleases and be under no control whatever. It means that Parliament has, so far as lies in its power, deliberately spoiled and undone, over the large area newly scheduled

* It may be pointed out in answer to my criticism that, in the Government's Bill as originally introduced the Board was to have had a strong popular element and that the Lords knocked it out. I think the Lords were right. If the work of re-distributing the land was to be entrusted to a representative body it should be one which reflected the broadest national and not the narrowest local view. The Government proposed to set up a Board of twenty members with what would have been in practice a predominant representation elected by the western County Councils. It was presumably thought that this would have surmounted the difficulties of re-distributing land, due to local prejudice. The view held by most impartial people, notably Lord MacDonnell, was that the Government's plan would have aggravated the difficulty, to say nothing of the unwieldy proportions of the proposed Board.

as congested, the work of building up the national character, on which some of the best of your countrymen had made so good a beginning. When I say "deliberately," I am wrong; Parliament did this without knowing what it was doing. It is inconceivable that English Liberals knowingly handed over £250,000 a year of public monies to a Board responsible, as a whole, neither to Parliament nor to any body representative of Irish opinion. There were few speeches and no debate on those provisions of the measure which treated Ireland to the meaningless and administratively vicious division into a "congested" one-third, where the agricultural population must, like the Indian ryot, remain under a paternal bureaucracy, and a "non-congested" two-thirds, where the farmers are fitted for a policy of self-help and democracy.

V.—The Way to Make the Best Use of Existing Institutions.

I have had to reflect upon some of our Parliamentary representatives as agricultural economists. I have now to suggest that you, who have to put in practice the principles of agricultural economics, should prove that you can be sound agricultural politicians. Surely the fact that without any consultation with you (because, for political reasons, the only organisation you have was ignored) there have been established in Ireland two agricultural policies, both of which certainly cannot be right, is sufficient justification for the advice I give you. I do not suggest that you should seek to abolish any institution. If there is one thing I despise in public men it is an addiction to pulling down when the situation calls for building up. I have always held that the surest way to get the institutions we need is to make the best of those we have. I agree with the well-known lines of Pope:—

"For forms of government let fools contest,
Whate'er is best administered is best."

Now the congested districts may not be very creditable to the Imperial Government; they are certainly a clog on

the Irish nation. So long as this part of the country remains depressed below a decent minimum of comfort and civilisation, the improvement of the whole country is hampered and delayed, partly because bad economic conditions are infectious and cannot be kept on one side of a county boundary, partly because every general measure of assistance which the Government might give must be adapted to the backward communities, and therefore becomes less fit for the advanced ones. Therefore it concerns you all, in your own interests as well as in the interests of the congested districts, that those districts should be improved as soon and as thoroughly as possible.

You will naturally ask: How is this to be done? By two measures principally. The first is the redistribution of land, so as to give as many farmers as possible holdings upon which they can live with decency. This measure is understood by all parties, and great powers and funds have been given to the new Congested Districts Board in order to carry it out. The second measure, quite as important as the first—more important in my opinion—is to organise the farmers of the congested districts into co-operative societies, and to apply throughout those districts the Recess Committee policy of self-help. Of course it is essential that both the Department and the new Board should do your public work in proper co-ordination with each other. It is no less necessary that they should both act in friendly consultation with your own organisation—the I.A.O.S. No changes in the constitution of either the Board or the Department will be required, but only certain modifications in their administrative procedure where they are doing work which cannot possibly be done well unless it is done in co-operation with organised bodies of farmers. Nor would I for a moment suggest that your organisation should interfere with the administration of these institutions. In my judgment the Board has a thoroughly competent staff for its proper work, and so has the Department. The educational work of the much-abused "alien" experts, who had to be brought from countries

where means were provided for applying the new knowledge to agriculture, is already beginning to tell. Any man going about the country can see that the tillage is improving, while the area under the plough has at long last begun to increase. Both the Department and the Board, if they were left alone and freed from outside interference, either in the name of political causes or of trade interests, would serve you well. Let us now consider what ought to be the attitude of organised farmers towards these two institutions, and we will take first the new Congested Districts Board.

The Board has been given two distinct functions; it is a land authority and a development authority. As a land authority, my advice to you is that you should accept and support it. Within its area, there will have to be a re-distribution of land and a migration of families on a larger scale than elsewhere in Ireland. The Board will thus be engaged in establishing communities which will play an important part in the new Ireland of the land settlement. My own opinion is that the carrying out of land purchase ought to have been entrusted to a single authority for the whole of Ireland, formed by amalgamating the Estates Branch of the old Congested Districts Board and Estates Commissioners. Dealing with land tenure is a sphere of administration which belongs properly to the government of the country. However, the next best plan is that upon which Parliament finally compromised, namely, to entrust it to a specially appointed body of men with the necessary knowledge and with a character and public position which will be a guarantee of absolute impartiality and of courage. Courage will be required to face unpopularity, because it will be necessary to disappoint more people than it will be possible to satisfy, since there is not enough untenanted land at the disposal of the Board to go round. As a member of the new Board, it ill becomes me to say that we possess all these qualifications, but I do say that you, the farmers of Ireland, should lead public opinion in giving us a fair trial. You should repose in the Board the

confidence which Parliament bespoke for it. Otherwise we cannot satisfactorily discharge the immensely difficult responsibilities which, rightly or wrongly, Parliament has imposed upon us.

Now, what should be the agricultural policy of the new Board? It is by no means a simple matter; the question of agricultural development in the congested districts is complicated enough in itself, and it has been made much more perplexing by the setting up of the second development authority. The conclusion at which I have arrived after a good deal of thought is that, although it was a mistake to cut off the new and enlarged congested districts from the rest of Ireland by putting them under a separate authority, there is something to be said for marking them off as a region requiring special attention and special activity by the Government in the work of land purchase and redistribution. I hope and believe that that work will now go forward with new energy and at an increased pace. I think that this forcing the pace in the establishment of new peasant proprietors justifies and even requires a corresponding forcing of the pace in the development work which must be done if they are to keep their new holdings and prosper in them. Now, I say to you farmers, that of all the reforms which must be made by our western peasantry if they are to prosper, by far the most urgent is their organisation into co-operative societies; this is the first and most essential part of agricultural development, upon which all the rest is to be built up. On these grounds I hold that, in the special circumstances of the congested districts, a Government subsidy to the I.A.O.S. is justified and even required. I think that you would be well advised to allow, and even to insist, that a part of the large endowment of the new Board should be devoted to this purpose; while at the same time, as late Vice-President of the Department, I do not think any part of that body's endowment should now be so used.

This distinction, you see, is neither arbitrary nor accidental; it corresponds to a real difference of principle.

The Department should work on the same lines all over Ireland, treating all men in the same fashion, helping each locality precisely in proportion as that locality helps itself. But the Congested Districts Board is set up to deal with particular districts because they are less able than others to help themselves. For this very reason its chief aim should be to put them as quickly as possible in a position where they can make the best use of the assistance which the Department offers to all. For these purposes, the Board has special funds. The funds of the Department, on the other hand, are to be spread all over Ireland, and they are all too scanty for the work they have to do.

The plan which I propose to you, then, is that the Department should, failing the augmentation of its funds from the Development Grant, devote its whole agricultural revenue, as it does now, to the government side of agricultural development all over Ireland, east and west alike, and should not give any money assistance to the work of co-operation; while the new Congested Districts Board should, within its own territory, subsidise the I.A.O.S. so that the work of organising the new agricultural communities may keep pace with their re-settlement on the land. The Board should, naturally, exercise whatever amount of supervision is necessary to see that its subsidy is properly spent. Both the Department and the Congested Districts Board, in their several spheres of action, should constantly have an eye to your movement and work in harmony with it; so that, for instance, the Board should always bear in mind, when setting up a new community of peasant proprietors; that the I.A.O.S. will have to organise these proprietors into co-operative societies, and should therefore consult the I.A.O.S. beforehand. Similarly, if the Department has, for example, a new scheme to propose for the better regulation of the butter industry, it should always consider how that scheme will work with the existing co-operative system of creameries, and should consult the I.A.O.S. on the point.

I think this is a reasonable, workable, plan, and I should advise you to press for it. I am sure that the part of it on which I lay most stress, namely, that both the Board and the Department should do their work with constant reference to your movement, will appear plain common sense to any one of you who thinks it over; and I know that to any Danish or French farmer it would seem mere obvious matter of course. Yet it is precisely this part of the scheme, the close alliance with the I.A.O.S., which the present responsible Head of the Department openly rejects, so far as the Department is concerned, and I think I am doing him no injustice if I say that the attack on the Credit Banks was intended to induce the Congested Districts Board to reject it too.

VI.—A Defence of the Agricultural Movement.

In considering, as we now must, Mr. Russell's treatment of your movement, I do not wish to dwell on the particular incidents. The report of the Butter Committee was exceedingly unfortunate in its terms, but Mr. Russell is not responsible for them, and the reception which the report has met with is such that he will probably not adopt the recommendations in their entirety. Mr. Russell is, of course, alone responsible for the absurd statement which he made that your agricultural credit societies could not pay 2s. 6d. in the pound, and that the system under which they were established was "rotten and indefensible." It is his general attitude to which I take exception. He professes a belief in agricultural co-operation and uses his official position to attack every attempt to develop it in Ireland. He reminds me of George Eliot's appreciation of Tom Tulliver—"a young gentleman fond of animals—fond, that is, of throwing stones at them."

As you know, the conflict over what we now call the movement and the policy has been waged upon the question whether assistance ought to be given out of public funds to

the I.A.O.S. As this question of the subsidy is likely to come up again, I think it well to give you briefly its history. During my Vice-Presidency the Department decided after very long and careful consideration to give a subsidy. This decision was approved by the Agricultural Board, submitted to the Council of Agriculture, and endorsed by that body by more than a two-to-one majority. It was given first because, in the days of Government neglect, those who were trying to organise farmers' business were called upon to give a good deal of technical advice as well. When the Departments' educational schemes got to work—and this took some time—the subsidy was continued because it was found that, by having to work with unorganised farmers, the Department was badly handicapped in comparison with similar departments doing similar work for your competitors abroad. At the same time, before I left the Department, I publicly stated that the financial assistance given out of the Department's funds to the I.A.O.S. could only be temporary, as their money would all be required for other purposes which were equally necessary for the welfare of the farmers.

In 1907 Mr. Russell succeeded me, and announced his co-operative policy, which was the gradual withdrawal of the subsidy. This was quite sound and was accepted by the I.A.O.S., many of whose chief supporters disliked assistance out of public funds. Then came the famous Rolleston letter, which I was supposed to have inspired, but with which I had nothing whatever to do, and a sudden withdrawal (which, Mr. Russell told a Committee of the House of Lords, Mr. Redmond had made "imperative"), of the promised remaining instalments of the subsidy on the ground that your movement was, on account of its alleged political designs, unworthy of public confidence and support. This meant a complete reversal of the Council of Agriculture's policy. But they were quite entitled to believe what the responsible Minister told them.

Mr. T. W. Russell carried the war into the territory of the Congested Districts Board. The I.A.O.S., in conformity with

the policy I have explained, asked the Board to treat you as the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries was treating English farmers. The English Agricultural Organisation Society, which is the counterpart of, and indeed was modelled upon the I.A.O.S., is being subsidised. In resisting our request Mr. Russell not only runs counter to the administrative policy of his own Government, but also to the intentions of Parliament as declared in its most recent agricultural legislation. The Development Fund Commissioners are by their Act charged to aid and develop agriculture by various measures, one of which is "the organisation of co-operation." Furthermore, they are specifically empowered to recognise and use in the administration of their funds voluntary associations not trading for profit. Mr. Dillon, when the Development Fund Act was in Committee, tried to get it so amended that the I.A.O.S. could not, even if you unanimously so desired, get any assistance from that source. Happily his English Liberal allies had British farmers to consider.

In no other country in the world, least of all in Mr. Russell's own, would a Minister of Agriculture be allowed thus to treat a farmers' movement. The suggestion that those Unionists on the governing body of the I.A.O.S., who give freely of their time, thought, and money to an object which they hold will increase the prosperity of their country, are in reality seeking party ends, is to tell them they are impostors and to tell you that you are fools. Scheming politicians do not spend money in this way; I wish to heaven they did. But what of the Nationalist promoters of your non-political movement? Let me tell you the story of one of them.

There is on the I.A.O.S. Committee an Irishman who had all his adult life been engaged in business and who, when he retired, sought to realise the long-cherished hope that he might do some good to his country. He came to the office of the I.A.O.S. one day and told us he had studied agricultural co-operation abroad, especially in France, was convinced that in supporting our work he could render the

best service to Ireland in the evening of his days. He had all his life been a fervent Nationalist and a subscriber to the United Irish League from its foundation. He knew that the I.A.O.S. was suspected of hostility to the party to which he belonged. He saw for himself that the charge was absurd. We wish Mr. Dillon would similarly give us a call and personally learn the truth. He would discover that we are honest Irishmen, with economic opinions in common, however we differ in politics. Our friendly Nationalist joined the Committee and is doing splendid work upon one of the most difficult problems of our farmers. I may add he is still the most unchanged and unchangeable of the advanced Nationalists I know.

So much for those whom the organised farmers appoint to be the masters of their Organisation Society. I must add a word upon its servants, who are also the subjects of cruel misrepresentation. In the debate to which I have several times referred, I find (in the official report) that Mr. Haviland Burke thus summed up the controversy to which it related :—“ I say deliberately that the beginning and middle and end of this whole controversy has been . . . the cutting off from these gentlemen (the organisers) the Treasury guarantee which fixes their salaries at a certainty, whereas now the Organisation Society have to collect their salaries as best they can. That is the plain English of the whole situation.” It may be ; but it is not the plain Irish. What mandate have your representatives to bring these charges against Irishmen who are faithfully performing arduous work from which you have derived solid and lasting benefit, and whose pay would cease the moment you believed that they were guilty? It may be that in the thousands of meetings which they have held, and under the grossest misrepresentation as to their deeds and their motives, they have occasionally—although I believe such instances are extremely rare—rebuked their political assailants. We all know of the appeal made on behalf of the Cities of the Plain, that if ten righteous men were found in them they might be saved. These guardians of our political morality seem to hold that if peradventure one politically

indiscreet organiser can be found, the I.A.O.S. should be damned.

It will be quite plain to any man of sense that no good can come to Ireland from the conduct of your public affairs either in Parliament or in Irish administration to which I have been compelled to advert. Clearly the remedy lies with you. You must see that farmers are properly represented on the County Councils, and then you will exercise your influence upon the Department in the way intended by Parliament, through the Council of Agriculture and the Agricultural Board. Although you are constitutionally excluded from all interference with the Congested Districts Board that body will take account of your opinion when you speak either directly through your business organisation, or indirectly through the democratic element in the Department's constitution. But before you are able to exercise any real political influence you must put your own house in order, get to understand your own movement, join and build up the only body which can speak authoritatively in your behalf upon your economic needs.

The chief non-agricultural supporters of the agricultural movement have joined it because they are confident that co-operation will produce the same results in Ireland as it has produced abroad. It is always found that where men come together for the business of their lives, and display towards each other that friendly attitude which is necessary to make co-operation succeed, the organisation originally started for business purposes is used for bringing people together in social intercourse for mutual benefit in other ways. The movement has other advantages not obvious but very real. Co-operation, the form of combination suitable to farmers, differs in one respect from the Joint Stock Company organisation suitable to the industrial and commercial occupations of the towns. In the co-operative society the participation is much more one of personal effort than of capital. Hence, everyone who joins has something to do, and in doing it is helping to build up the general

business of the community. Thus a local patriotism is developed. One other observed tendency of co-operative organisation, which to my mind has much virtue, is the bringing to the front the men whose business capacity makes some solid contribution to the well-being of their neighbours. In every way, co-operation tends to make Ireland a better place to live in, but I admit at once that the movement must be justified by the material benefits it will bring, and upon these I must now say a word. Whatever the higher aims of the movement, I recognise that, unless it makes your industry more profitable to you it would not last; nor would it put you in a position to rebuild the social as well as the economic life of the country-side.

It is obvious that no business can prosper unless those who conduct it move with the times. Moving with the times is, in plain language, changing your methods of working and doing business to meet the changes which are constantly being made in the methods of those with whom you compete. All alert and successful business men nowadays do this, and so do those foreign rivals of yours who are beating you in the British, and sometimes even in the Irish markets. Their strength is in their co-operation; your weakness is in your antiquated isolation. Yet it has been proved all over Ireland that you have just the qualities—inherited, as I believe, from the days of the Clan—needed for successful co-operation. When you all come into the movement, as you some day will, and learn its possibilities, you will have to consider a great variety of purposes for which you might combine with advantage. The manufacture of butter and cheese, the growing and the after-treatment of flax; the joint ownership of costly machinery and breeding stock; the joint purchase, at the lowest price and of the best quality, of seeds, manures, implements, and all kind of farming requirements; the marketing of everything you produce; the provision of working capital upon satisfactory terms; the insurance of your live stock and other property at reasonable rates—these and other things, which your com-

petitors do, can be done well only by organised bodies of farmers.

But here I must not go further into details.* I am not explaining agricultural co-operation, but only trying to arouse your interest in and curiosity about it. I am trying to get you to take a broad national view of a scheme of Irish progress of which the majority of you have been given a wholly wrong idea. I need hardly tell you that nearly a hundred thousand of you have not joined and put money into co-operative societies without good reason. The rest of you hold back—to the great satisfaction of some Irishmen who do not understand the aims and objects of your movement, and of a great many foreign farmers who understand it very well. If you understood you would surely support the I.A.O.S. more strongly than you do. That body has been for many years past endeavouring to remove the great disadvantages under which you labour through not being organised as your Continental rivals are organised. In this service has been expended no less than £100,000 voluntarily subscribed. This is never mentioned; but you hear a great deal about the sum, less than one-third of that amount, which you are told has been misappropriated from public funds. Yet I say to you that the primary object of all this Irish effort and expenditure was to prevent the great scheme of land settlement in Ireland from failing in its purpose. The sole means employed is bringing to you the knowledge which is required before you can re-organise your industry, by changing it from the old methods of helpless isolation to the new methods of intelligent combination.

If this re-organisation is not completed, there is little hope for the new land settlement; the "magic of property" is not enough to make small holdings successful. This truth, familiar to everyone who has studied the subject, is

* Those who wish to support the movement as individuals, and any bodies of farmers wishing to form a co-operative society should write to the Secretary of the I.A.O.S., the Plunkett House, Dublin. I cannot too strongly advise those who desire to master the co-operative idea to take in the *Irish Homestead*.

beginning to be well understood in England ; and those of us who press for Government recognition for the co-operative movement are able to use the powerful argument that by this means the British tax-payer is improving the security for the huge sums of public money now invested in Irish land. Imagine the effect on the British tax-payer—not altogether a fool, I assure you—when your Parliamentary representatives, while pressing for Land Purchase, attack the only policy which can make it safe.

There is one consideration I would put before you which I trust will make a wide and strong appeal to Irishmen. Agricultural co-operation brings far greater benefits to the small than to the large farmer. The large farmer can often protect himself by inviting competition for his business. The small man must deal near home, and very often is not free to choose to whom he shall entrust any part of his business. Now, where a community is organised on co-operative lines, the weak family can unload a large part of its business on the strong association, benefiting not only itself but the association as well. It will happen only too frequently that death or sickness—or perhaps even the lure of America—may make it extremely difficult for a family to maintain a decent standard of comfort upon what was under other circumstances an economic holding. In these cases, the co-operative organisation of the community is the salvation of its poorer members.

Lastly, while agricultural organisation upon co-operative lines is universal on the Continent, where farmers occupying small holdings recognise in it the only way to meet modern competition, there is one great difference between the means by which the co-operative system is promoted in the British Isles and in Continental countries. Abroad the systems of national education are in one essential respect far superior to ours. In town and country alike children are taught to take an intelligent interest in the work which is going on around them and by which their parents live. There is thus developed in them a way of looking at things which

we may call a commercial instinct. When they grow up they do not have to be taught—this instinct tells them—that under modern conditions those engaged in any important industry or business must combine or go to the wall. The lack of a similar system of education in Ireland must be held to account sufficiently for the fact that agricultural co-operation is so hard to introduce, and that it has to be taught in our own country by a propagandist association at great expenditure of labour, time and money. I hope I have satisfied you as those of us who have worked in this movement are satisfied that the cause is worth the sacrifice.

VII.—The Farmer as Peacemaker.

I began these *Plain Talks* with the assertion that you had it in your power to make or mar the fortunes and the reputation of our country. I have tried to show you that, in common with many another rural community which has been placed in a similar position of national responsibility, you will have to reorganise your private business and so gain the mastery of your public affairs. I have argued that the traders and politicians alike who oppose your efforts in this direction, do not rightly read the signs of the times, or understand the interests of their business or their calling. To the one the productivity of your industry will be of more lasting advantage than your industrial or commercial backwardness ; the other will find in the growth of your economic independence a better foundation for statesmanship than your political servility.

The clouds are lifting. During the present year the enlightened action of the Dublin and Belfast Chambers of Commerce has testified to the higher place you are beginning to occupy in the economic life of the country. On the other hand I have had to point out that recent events—certain provisions of the Land Bill of last year, which have superimposed upon your policy of self-help and democracy a retrograde system of paternalism and bureaucracy ; a debate in Parlia-

ment showing invincible ignorance of every principle of rural progress for which many of you had striven for the last twenty years, and lastly the hostile official attitude to the farmers' movement—of what was intended to be before all things a farmers' department—all these things go to prove that in your public affairs you have yet to begin to learn how to use your political influence. We can more readily excuse the mistakes of Parliament in agricultural legislation than we can forgive administration hostile to farmers in Ireland. Your Department had throughout its every branch the genuine desire, and I think I may add the proved capacity, to do good work in repairing the neglect of Irish Government in the past, and to bring the newest knowledge into your oldest industry. Not a worker in that institution but knows full well that all it can do for you is of far lesser importance than what you can, by organisation, do for yourselves. These men realise the futility of asking you to put more skill, industry, and more capital into your farms, if the produce of your land is to remain fatally handicapped in the markets which are now controlled by your organised foreign competitors. And yet this Department is wantonly brought into conflict with a body, which in the region of private enterprise has, may I not say, served you unselfishly and well. And all this on the preposterous ground that a few of your countrymen who have devoted their means and leisure to helping you in the great task which lies before you at this crisis—who have swept Europe and America for the knowledge they did not themselves possess of how this could best be done—are really engaged upon an elaborate scheme for "bursting up and destroying the national cause and the national movement."

I have no desire to stir up strife. Never was it more necessary that you and I should see things clearly and discuss them pleasantly, for we have got to look some ugly facts in the face which the most confused history in Europe has hidden from us. We seem to be born with an instinct which makes us go hunting about for somebody, preferably the

Government, to blame for our shortcomings. When, as is the case now, the business under discussion is within our own control, this national habit makes us fall upon each other. We never know how foolish we then look, because we have sharp tongues, and outsiders do not say all that they think about us—more's the pity. In our self-help movement we have not, so far, experienced the inevitable split. We have acted, and must continue to act, in the spirit of first promoters of the co-operative movement in these islands, who proudly boasted that in co-operation they had discovered the peace of industry.

But do not let those who love fighting think I am going to spoil the fun. I have not touched upon religion, whose most valiant controversialists sometimes makes us wonder where their charity comes in; and I quite account for the mistake the little girl made when she told the minister she was going to be taken to see the wild beasts in the Theological Gardens. Nor do I interfere with party politics, where Home Rule, the land question, education and taxation, to go no further, surely give us all the battle ground the most pugnacious politician can desire. If, like the Salvation Army, in the pursuit of peace you must feel the joy of war, permit me to tell you that you have before you now a nobler battle than any in which our country has been engaged since Irish deeds were as big as words are now. The fight to which I summon you will be against the passions, the habits, and methods which have come down to us from a long and bitter past; it will be against ourselves. You, who have now the chief work to do for Ireland, will have to exercise, and encourage in others, freedom in expressing, and patience in listening to, honest opinions. Unless you do this you will not win that mastery of your fortunes and of your country's destiny which I have ventured to tell you is both your duty and your due.

I hope I have made clear to you the nature of the task which lies before you. The transfer of the land virtually pulls down the whole fabric of rural society in Ireland, but

it does nothing towards the building of the new edifice upon the ground thus cleared. It is you who will have to do this work, and I have tried to define the movement and the policy which you need to make good the foundations of the new order. But whether the new rural economy in Ireland is to be a tottering fabric which falls before the first assault of trade or politics, or a castle of Irish self-help "foursquare to all the winds that blow," depends upon what is here, as in every other country in the world, the essential condition of national progress—the national character. Here we are handicapped, no doubt. In the days when most nations either inflicted or suffered religious and political persecution and commercial restrictions, our people suffered these evils in a very severe form. The religion of the majority came triumphantly through the ordeal, but the political and industrial character of the whole nation did not emerge unharmed. It is the peculiarly diabolical nature of such political and commercial oppression as Ireland endured that it not only inflicts suffering on its victims, but impairs their character.*

With such a past, may we not wisely put all Irish policies and all Irish movements to this test. How do they affect our industrial character, and how do they help us to overcome

* Lecky, the fairest of all Irish historians, speaking of the character of the Irish nation, at the end of the eighteenth century, says:—"If the domestic and religious virtues were prominent in the national type, no people in Europe were more destitute of the political and industrial ones." Writing of my countrymen as they are a century later, in a book which raised a storm among those whose indignation was so great that they did not read it, I said:—"I agree with those who hold that the strongest indictment which can be made against past misgovernment is the demoralising influence it exerted upon the character of the governed. . . . But I strongly disagree with those who, while cherishing the remembrance of these wrongs, denounce those who call attention to their inevitable effects. . . . The triumph of the race is that on one side of its character—and that, happily, the higher side—it came out of the ordeal even purified by its trials. But it is the folly of follies to say that on its other side the national character has preserved that strength, self-reliance, and sense of responsibility, or that appreciation of true liberty, which a modern people must possess if it is to succeed, or even to survive, in the industrial fight."

I recall this passage merely to explain a point of view which has come to me from the reading of history and the study, for thirty years, of my countrymen at home and abroad.

the weaknesses and utilise the strength of that character? I claim for the practical business movement I have asked you to join and support that it satisfies this test. Speaking of the majority of my countrymen, may I not say that their weakness lies in individual, their strength in common, action? Now, the characteristic of the co-operative movement, with its scheme of self-help effected through mutual help, is that it strengthens individual effort through the power of the community. The curse of Ireland has been in the past, and still is, that the power of the community is used not to stimulate but to suppress individual thought and energy. Your power in combination for a given end is great; your individual power to help yourselves is pitifully small. Our country would leap into prosperity if you could bring to the conduct of your industry one-half the zeal you are ever ready to lavish on a cause.

Throughout our history we have always cared more for great causes and high ideals, and less for immediate practical gain, than some of our neighbours. This tendency of ours may have brought us loss and misfortune sometimes, but it is a part of our national character which I for one would not willingly see changed, and I appeal to it now. Co-operation is not merely a way to put money in your pockets; it is a great engine for the reconstruction of your rural life; you must put all your minds to understanding and developing it. It will give you, if you pursue it earnestly, what many of you are neglecting it to seek—a real national life built up on real common interests. Every improvement which it makes in the conditions of your industry will help to build up that community life which Ireland has never had since the Tudor legislation destroyed the ancient clan system, but which co-operation has to some extent revived. Without this great unifying force, your possession of the land as isolated owners will make you first selfish and then poor. Knowing what I know of the fate of peasants in every part of the world where they are not organised, it fills me with apprehension to see the Government launching peasant proprietors by tens of

thousands on a new career, buoyed up by the sense of ownership, but isolated, unorganised, and therefore defenceless. Without co-operation, these new proprietors will not be able permanently to maintain their position; for them it is a necessity.

But for the better-off among you who love their country and wish to remain and work in it, the co-operative movement shows the right way. There will be a brightening of life when you come together and work together for yourselves, for each other, and for your country. It is no use fighting the battles of other days while you are failing in the work of to-day. You have a cause in the present day conditions of your industry—and it is by industry that a nation lives—which offers to you the opportunity of realising the noblest ambition a nation can set before it. It is by the sweat of our brows, not by the wag of our tongues, we must eat bread. But it is not by bread alone that a people—least of all a Celtic people—can live and thrive. The principles of co-operative organisation may be uninspiring and its working details are certainly dull. Yet I hold that by intelligent and faithful pursuit of this new Irish idea, with its industrial opportunities and social aspirations, you may

“Win and wear the proudest share
Of Ireland's proudest day.”

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